

I am writing in strong support of continuation of Section 255 of the Telecommunications Act. I am blind, and have found no evidence that competition has driven cell phone manufacturers and service providers to make the full range of cellular phone/PCS services available to people who are blind and visually impaired. For example, I have been unable to locate a cell phone that will speak all menu options, address book listings, missed call logs, text messages, Internet sites, via synthetic speech. My sighted friends and colleagues avail themselves of these functions as a matter of routine for both work and recreation. Some cellular phone companies (such as Sprint, my provider) send forgotten passcodes to customers' cell phones in the form of text messages (e.g., from the company Web site). I am unable to access this information in this form; as a result, I must call and wade through Sprint's complex and extremely cumbersome and mostly automated voice mail system and spend considerable time on hold before finally reaching a human agent who can assist me. This can take as long as an hour, resulting in lost productivity and considerable personal frustration. Of course the important point is that I cannot access the functionality of my cellular phone, for which I have nonetheless been forced to pay-- my last phone, purchased about 6 weeks ago, cost over \$150.00 and includes a great many features, but I can do only the most routine tasks: making and answering calls. I have repeatedly called major vendors, including Sprint, AT&T, Ericsson, and Nokia to ask about the availability of phones with built-in synthetic speech. Usually this query is met with bewilderment by call-center personnel who have no idea what I am talking about, and who cannot refer me to employees who might be in a position to answer my questions. On occasion someone expresses interest and concern, but cannot provide information. There is apparently one Nokia model, the Communicator, which has been available in Europe for some time, that will permit the addition of a third-party synthetic speech solution, but the price is prohibitive, totalling over \$900.00. Since most people who are blind are either unemployed or underemployed, such a high price keeps them out of the market for this product-- and even though I am employed I cannot afford such a high price. I urge the FCC to require cell phone manufacturers and service providers to meet the needs of more than 10,000,000 Americans who are blind or visually impaired.